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ABSTRACT

Recent events in Europe suggest that the pattern of global ideological struggle that provoked the division of Korea is apparently dissolving, giving way to nationalist movements. The division of the Korean people now appears anachronistic. There are signs that reunification is possible. Despite the importance of the Korean peninsula in world affairs, the two Koreas are often neglected in social studies courses. To promote effective teaching about them, this ERIC Digest examines reasons for teaching about Korea and ways to integrate Korea into the curriculum, while recommending useful resources for teachers. (18 references) (Author)

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by
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Teaching About the Two Koreas

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Recent events in Europe suggest that the pattern of global ideological struggle which provoked the division of Korea is apparently dissolving, giving way to nationalist movements. The division of the Korean people now appears to be anachronistic. There are signs that reunification is possible.

Despite the importance of the Korean peninsula in world affairs, the two Koreas are often neglected in social studies courses. To promote effective teaching about them, this ERIC Digest examines reasons for teaching about Korea and ways to integrate Korea into the curriculum, while recommending useful resources for teachers.

Why Should Korea Be Included in the Social Studies Curriculum? Divided since the end of World War II, Korea has been a center of international turmoil throughout much of its history. The Chinese, Mongols, Japanese, Manchus, Russians, and Americans are among the foreign peoples who have exerted military force on the peninsula, which lies in a strategic location between the present-day Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China, and Japan. Korean culture has thus received a number of outside influences, yet Koreans possess a unique heritage of which they are proud, and they continue to seek national reunification.

Issues involving Korea will continue to be in the news. The question of reunification tops the list. The North Korean government and South Korean dissidents have blamed the U.S. presence in South Korea for hindering the reunification process. Conversely, South Korean leaders denounce the menacingly large military force in the North. Reunification offers a number of potential benefits, although the economic problems engendered by the rapid German reunification have not gone unnoticed in Korea. Analysts look for both sides to move cautiously. The future of the North Korean regime after the passing of its aging leader Kim Il Sung is another pressing question. Timely issues such as human rights, democratization, and the petitions of both Koreas for United Nations membership will also be widely discussed in the foreseeable future.

Although divided, the Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea (DPRK or North Korea) and the Republic of Korea (ROK or South Korea) have each attained levels of infrastructure development which could not have been predicted when the peninsula was in ruins at the end of the Korean War. In recent years, the economy of communist North Korea has lagged far behind that of the capitalist South, but the North Korean economy was for many years one of the most successful among communist nations, and has thrived on a strategy of import substitution and export promotion. Both countries have received large amounts of foreign aid. Direct trade between the North and South, which has opened recently on a small scale, may eventually lead to closer inter-Korean relations.

The United States and South Korea are economically interdependent. By the end of the 1980s, South Korea was the United States' seventh largest trading partner, and the United States was the fourth largest consumer of South Korean exports and the second largest source of Korean imports.

The United States has a force of approximately 40,000 troops in South Korea to defend the country against potential enemies. The United States military commitment to South Korea and its economic ties with the nation ensure that issues involving Korea will remain consequential to Americans. The Bush Administration has reasserted the U.S. pledge to maintain a military force in South Korea, although plans are underway to reduce the number of U.S. bases and eventually to remove U.S. military personnel from Seoul.

Korea has contributed much to regional and world culture. Inlaid Koryo celadons grace the world's finest museums. Korea has transmitted elements of continental culture to Japan, as well as making its own innovative contributions to Japanese culture. Korean moveable type predates Gutenberg's version by several centuries. The *han'gul* alphabet, developed in Korea in the fifteenth century, is one of the world's easiest and most systematic scripts. *T'aekwondo*, a martial art indigenous to Korea, is practiced throughout the world for its benefits as a sport and a means of self defense.

The number of Korean immigrants to the United States is growing steadily. Large Korean-American communities exist in many cities. These immigrants have demonstrated family and community solidarity, establishing churches and cooperative business ventures. Like previous immigrant groups, Korean Americans have experienced racial discrimination.

How Can Korea Be Integrated into the Curriculum? Important as it is to the United States, the Korean peninsula is not likely to overtake Japan, the Soviet Union, or the countries of Europe in the minds of curriculum planners. Still, its virtual absence in today's curricula is unfortunate. Korea can be introduced into a variety of courses to teach diverse skills at all levels of the curriculum. Interest in Korea has been growing recently, and a number of useful teaching aids were developed in anticipation of the 1988 Seoul Olympics. The exploration of Korea in the classroom is only limited by the teacher's imagination.

Explore Korean language and literature. Although many native English speakers find Korean grammar to be difficult, the *han'gul* alphabet, with characters designed to represent the shape of the mouth during speech, can be learned easily in a matter of hours. In primary grades, a language lesson might include basic verbal greetings and gestures, along with the introduction of *han'gul*. Korean stories and poetry appropriate to many levels are now available in English translations. Some examples of these, as well as a variety of literature on East Asian topics, can be found in the catalogue of the non-profit JACP Inc., 414 E. 3rd Ave., P.O. Box 367, San Mateo, CA 94401: 800/874-2242.

Examine Korean thought and society. Today the Korean peninsula is home to a variety of indigenous and borrowed sys-

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tems of thought and religion, and two radically different societies. North Korea has officially abandoned the traditions of Confucianism and Buddhism for Marxism and *juche*, ruler Kim Il Sung's doctrine of self-sufficiency. In rural parts of South Korea, many folk religious practices are grounded in indigenous shamanism as well as Confucianism and Buddhism, which came to Korea from China. Approximately one-fifth of the South Korean population is Christian, the largest percentage for any East Asian nation. Students at all levels might be introduced to these thought systems with varying degrees of sophistication appropriate to students of different ages and grades in school.

In elementary and middle grades, students may be asked to compare their own daily schedules with those of Korean children and to then speculate about the social values implicit in these activities. For example, they might question why Korean school children have less free time than their American counterparts and then compare the ways in which both groups use their available leisure time. They might also be asked to compare Korean folk heroes with those from their own cultures.

High school students might be asked to compare the sociopolitical systems of the two Koreas, realizing that each side is likely to have strengths as well as weaknesses. Examining the impact of Western culture on the peninsula would reveal to students the persistence of traditions despite the selective adoption of foreign ideas. Despite its isolation, there is evidence that North Korean society is experiencing limited economic liberalization, allowing some foreign investment in joint business ventures. In South Korea, rapid social change and increased affluence have been attended by demands from women, college students, labor groups, and the growing middle class for greater participation in society.

Include Korea in units on East Asia and the Pacific Rim. Korea is too often slighted in East Asia surveys, treated merely in its role as a conduit in the cultural exchange between China and Japan. In some texts, Korea appears only during those periods when it was a bone of contention between the two. Devoting appropriate attention to Korea, in its geographical context, will allow teachers to point out the real diversity within the East Asian cultural sphere. The study of Korea is also a good way to introduce the concept of the Pacific Rim and the four "Newly Industrialized Countries" (NICs) of South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore. Cover both North and South Korea. Politicians and journalists regularly use the term "Korea" to refer to the southern state, exacerbating our ignorance of the DPRK.

Discuss Korea in United States History courses. The Korean War should be studied in units dealing with the Cold War, as the first major test of the United States' policy of containment. The experiences of Korean Americans may be studied along with those of other large immigrant groups to illuminate both common and unique problems, as well as coping strategies. They may also be used to assess the historical course of American attitudes and policies toward newcomers.

Utilize available resources. Publications such as the *New York Times* and *Christian Science Monitor* frequently carry articles on North and South Korea. The weekly *Far Eastern Economic Review* and its Asia yearbooks are excellent sources on the economics and politics of all Pacific Rim nations. The U.S. Department of State offers a number of useful materials free or at a nominal cost.

Abundant sources of information on Korea are often overlooked. Contact local PBS television stations for relevant program listings. Korean food stores often stock toys and magazines, as well as rental videos of South Korean films and television programs. Their proprietors may provide information and contacts with local Korean-American communities. Korean student organizations at large public and private universities may sponsor lectures and cultural events that are open to the public.

General information about Korea can be obtained by writing or calling the Information Office, Korean Embassy, 2320 Massachusetts Avenue N.W., Washington, DC 20008, (202) 939-5687.

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The following list of resources includes references used to prepare this Digest. The items followed by an ED number are in the ERIC system. They are available in microfiche and paper copies from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). For information about prices, contact EDRS, 7420 Fullerton Road, Suite 110, Springfield, Virginia 22153-2852; telephone numbers are 703/440-1400 or 800/443-3742. Entries followed by an EJ number are annotated monthly in CURRENT INDEX TO JOURNALS IN EDUCATION (CIJE), which is available in most larger public libraries or university libraries. EJ documents are not available through EDRS. However, they can be located in the journal section of most libraries by using the bibliographic information provided below.

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